IS HISTORY RELEVANT?

IDEAS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY IN THE 1990'S

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Among the unexpected by-products of the United States' "victory" in the Cold War is a certain nostalgia for the old world order that crumbled so quickly. At least we knew where we stood in the post-World War II bipolar world. Today the familiar guideposts are gone, and our quest for new ones ranges as far back as the early 1900s. Is there a previous era that can tell us what to do now? While the answer to that question is no, there are lessons and ideas from various segments of our past that will stand us in good stead as we develop a national security strategy for the 90s.

The first question to ask is: what is the international environment in which this strategy will operate? The world power structure appears to be shifting to a more diffuse, multipolar configuration. The situation is still in flux, however, and at present the United States stands alone as the e state with superpower status in all spheres. The USSR retains very substantial military power but is rapidly shedding its empire and is clearly not an economic power. Germany and Japan are struggling with the question of whether superpower status can be based on economic power alone. The emergence of a united Europe would change the equation again. If we narrow the focus to regional problems, various other states, including China, become necessary players. We also cannot ignore transnational actors such as multinational corporations, religious organizations and terrorist groups.

Despite its superpower status, the relative power of the US globally has declined in the past twenty years. To the extent that US primacy after 1945 was an anomaly that could not last, Nixon and Carter were right in accepting this decline as inevitable. We could not prevent the rise of other power centers, and sometimes we were responsible. What was not evitable, and may still be reversible, is that portion of the decline which results from choices made by US leaders, including the Vietnam War and huge budget deficits.

Conflict appears inevitable in the current environment, although much more likely on a regional rather than global scale. Whether it is good for the national character, as Teddy Roosevelt and George Kennan argued, is arguable. Part of the reason conflict exists is that power remains the dominant factor in relations between states. Those who thought in the 1920s that they could outlaw war by agreement were either naive or too far ahead of the times. The world has not yet reached a point where international law is sufficient to govern relations between states. Despite this, it is a world of interdependence, where anything beyond bare survival requires ties to others.

Was there a time in the past when US leaders faced an environment similar to the one today? Not really. The period between the world wars also saw a process of trying to reassemble a balance of power that had broken down. The difference then was the role of the United States. We were a major world economic power in the 1920s but had retreated from the use of political and military power and were unwilling to act as a superpower.

While the environment has changed, basic US interests have not. Broadly stated, those interests are: survival of the US as a nation with its values and institutions intact, advancement of economic and social welfare and prosperity, and creation of a world order congenial to US values and institutions. What has changed back and forth over time is the method for defining interests. For certain policymakers, whatever the enemy threatened became an interest; thus interests expanded as threats multiplied. The US is better served by adopting Kennan's view that interests are independent of threats, thus ensuring that we define our own interests rather than having them defined for us by our adversaries.

Assessment of the threats which face the US raises two other issues

that have surfaced over the past few decades. Do we judge potential enemies by their intentions or their capabilities? Where do the "borders" of the US and the Western Hemisphere lie when we consider possible threats? Kennan again provides a useful guide for the first question; the combination of capability and hostile intention creates a threat. Since intentions are difficult to measure, this means threat assessment is not a cut-and-dried task. Looking at others' capabilities alone, however, provides an incomplete, and potentially very misleading, picture. The US has taken a very expansive view of "territory" in the past, with Franklin Roosevelt, for example, extending the hemisphere to Greenland and Iceland to support Atlantic convoy operations. Given the technologies available today, it seems only prudent to continue taking a wider view when necessary to define threats to the US.

What threats does the US face in the next few years? The threat to national survival from the USSR, which has driven policy since 1945, is declining rapidly as Soviet leaders try to recreate their state and society. Yet we cannot write off the potential for future Soviet threats. Internal instability could result in nuclear weapons falling into the hands of unfriendly groups or reform attempts could fail with a resulting backlash leading to a new government hostile to the US. The potential for dissolution of the USSR raises endless possibilities for speculation, although the main threats to the US would derive from possession of nuclear weapons or impact on the global economy. Of the various regional powers none, including the PRC, offers a real threat against the physical security of the US. As the current Gulf Crisis shows, however, some of them can threaten US economic prosperity and values (e.g. protection of American citizens). Use of nuclear weapons in a regional war could set off a wider conflict involving the US or undermine the world order by legitimizing the

use of such weapons.

The major threat to US economic welfare and prosperity comes from our
n previous policies. We are now a debtor nation vulnerable to decisions by other states on whether they will help finance our deficits. Our economic problems undermine our ability to project power and weaken the perception of our power held by others. Both of these factors tie into the third interest area, creating a congenial world order, including projecting our values overseas. Failure of the current democratic experiments in the USSR, Eastern Europe and elsewhere would be a major blow to that interest, yet we are unable to provide major financial assistance to those countries. Their vision of US democracy also is diminished when we obviously are unable to take care of less fortunate members of society. Finally it is possible that the dissatisfaction of the American people with national leadership on economic questions could weaken support for leaders in other policy areas
ch as national security.

President Carter tried to focus attention on nontraditional threats to US security, an effort which was unsuccessful in the 1970s but should be reconsidered now. Although not all are immediate, there are potential dangers to the US from international problems such as drugs, pollution and population growth, particularly in Mexico. The difficulty, as Carter found, is to concentrate attention on those threats that are more long-term in nature.

With the environment, interests and potential threats sketched out, the next step is possible objectives for US security strategy. For the purposes of this paper, these are defined broadly as the following: restoration of US economic strength, assistance to democratic and capitalist institutions abroad (Eastern Europe, USSR and elsewhere), containment of
gional conflicts and development of multilateral solutions to global

problems such as nuclear proliferation, pollution and drugs. Ronald Reagan was correct in placing priority on economic buildup; unfortunately he did not draw from Eisenhower's advice that defense should not result in the destruction of that being defended. While much of the focus to resolve our economic problems has to be domestic rather than foreign, the traditional US emphasis on free trade and equal commercial opportunities could be subsidiary objectives. The need to deal with regional conflicts should be determined by the threat posed to US interests and by judging each situation on its own merits, keeping in mind as Carter suggested that the root causes generally are indigenous.

Looking at what types of power the US can bring to bear to reach these objectives raises another fundamental question for US policymakers over the past few decades. Are our means limited or expandable? In the current atmosphere of budget crisis, it is virtually impossible to argue for expandable means. While it may be true that the American people could support increased spending for foreign operations, there is no indication that the national will does, or should, exist to make the required sacrifices. The existence of the US itself is not at stake. There are sufficient domestic problems to address, and it is not unreasonable for the American worker to expect help with the burden of the Gulf crisis from those others who also stand to be affected negatively. If policymakers do not acknowledge limits on our resources, we run the risk that Eisenhower described of pushing people into isolationism by making the cost of internationalism too high.

Power consists of potential factors such as economic capacity, population and natural resources, as well as actual factors such as military forces and foreign aid. It also includes, as various leaders have pointed out, intangible factors like credibility and perception and the will to use

the factors accumulated. At times American leaders have made the mistake of treating credibility as an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. They have not been wrong, though, in pointing out that power is in the eye of the beholder you wish to influence and that power is weakened if no one believes you will use it. The will to use power means accepting, as Wilson discovered, that there may be times when you have to go to war in order to make peace.

In considering the actual instruments of power, current strategists should follow the Kennedy and Carter models of looking to a broad range of tools. With the expectation of conflict in the world, we will have to be prepared to use military force. The US remains the dominant global military power. While we may or may not have strategic nuclear parity with the USSR, the latter does not have the same ability to project conventional power on a global basis. Our desire and ability to respond to the Gulf crisis shows the utility of keeping sufficient conventional forces to address regional conflict. Nuclear forces remain necessary as a deterrent, as Kennan pointed out, but experience has shown that their presence does not deter limited, conventional wars as theorists like Brodie predicted. No one believes the US will use nuclear weapons to stop local conflicts.

The other instruments are equally necessary, and in many situations more so. Diplomacy and negotiation can serve all of our objectives, from seeking a reduction of economic protectionism to seeking solutions to regional conflicts. Alliances remain useful in an era of limited means, but we should be careful not to allow maintenance of an alliance to become an end in itself. Foreign assistance and cultural and information exchanges are particularly useful for efforts to build democracy and capitalism in other states. While the US government should acknowledge and support the role that US business can play in this area, we also should take heed of the

lessons learned in the first two decades of this century that private business will not sacrifice its own interests in order to serve the broader national interest defined by government leaders. Policymakers can draw on other economic tools such as tariff policy, control of assets, embargoes and sanctions, and they can look to the usefulness of international organizations in mobilizing wider support for US policies. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the UN is "working" in the Gulf crisis because it is finally operating as FDR envisioned, with full agreement of the big, "police" powers.

Finally, a look at ideas that seem useful for designing the actual strategy that will link means to ends. In overall terms, the US should follow a modified balance of power approach. We are too "entangled" and interdependent with the rest of the world to retreat to an isolationist or hemispheric defense approach. Allowing private business to be the main engine of our relationships risks the government being forced into action by business decisions. The necessary international consensus to support a true collective security system does not exist; nations are not ready to surrender power to an overriding system. With the changes in the USSR, the US is most likely to use a balance of power approach on a regional level. We also must rebuild our own economic strength and power.

The US government will not be successful, however, if it follows the true balance of power strategy embodied in Kissinger's realpolitik. Perhaps the most persistent theme in twentieth century US foreign policy is the desire to project our values and to stand for some higher cause. The American people are not comfortable with a strategy that ignores entirely the internal character of the states we support and that requires us to turn enemies overnight into friends. This does not mean that we should take the extreme that Carter did at times of allowing our insistence on values to

harm our friends, but somewhere there is a balance between that and the possibility of siding with China to fight the USSR in order to save an authoritarian government in Pakistan.

Our strategy should allow us to set priorities. Threats are not indivisible; neither are interests. Means are limited. Not all areas of the world are vital to the US. We can tolerate diversity and "losses." In looking at another of the continuing debates of the past decades, asymmetry is preferable to symmetry. We should choose how and where to respond to threats. To do otherwise is to have our strategy determined by our adversaries.

What role does the President play in all this? While he (or she) needs to maintain a certain freedom of action to deal with crises or conduct relations in secret when necessary, the President cannot forget his publics. As Truman discovered before drafting NSC-68, and Nixon and Kissinger made evident by their actions, the bureaucracy needs a clear idea of the strategy and its goals in order to act effectively. And no President can expect to get policy implemented without the bureaucracy. The same is true for a President's relations with Congress. Lastly, but most importantly, the American people expect and are entitled to at least a general idea of what their government is trying to accomplish. To attempt to conduct security policy without some popular participation undermines the democratic institutions that policy is intended to protect.